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BIRD OBSERVATIONS IN THE PROPOSED MAGIC MOUNTAIN ENTERTAINMENT PROJECT AREA, NEAR VALENCIA, CALIFORNIA, 2004

Prepared for:

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REVISED

August 24, 2004

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Nature and Scope of Surveys

During the spring and early summer of 2004 surveys were conducted within the boundaries of the proposed Magic Mountain Entertainment Project and adjacent Magic Mountain area. The area surveyed is roughly triangular in shape, bounded on the northeast by the Santa Clara River and the Old Road, on the southeast by Southern California Edison power lines, and on the west by a wide valley (Figure 1). The area includes the Six Flags Magic Mountain development (which was not surveyed) as well as undeveloped hillsides and some agricultural fields to the east and north of Magic Mountain.

Surveys were focused on determining presence or absence of California gnatcatcher, and followed U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Guidelines for this species. Surveys followed the protocol for non-NCCP areas, involving 6 surveys of each area, occurring between March 15 and June 30 (see Table 1 for exact dates). Each survey involved two observers and lasted about 3 hours (6:30 to 9:30 a.m.), with each observer covering an area less than 80 acres of suitable habitat.

Each survey was conducted on foot by observers well acquainted with both visual and auditory characteristics of southern California birds. Tapes of calls of California gnatcatcher were played periodically along survey routes in an attempt to elicit a response. Survey routes were designed to visit all areas within the Proposed Project Area. However, routes for regular coverage were selected through preliminary surveys and were designed to cover all areas of appropriate habitat for the focus species. Personnel for all surveys were Daniel A. Guthrie and Judith A. Sugden, both working under Federal Fish and Wildlife Service Permit number TE810394-2, issued under section 10(a)(1)(A) of the Endangered Species Act.

On each survey, numbers of all species observed were noted and, in addition to the gnatcatcher, special attention was placed on locating species considered rare and endangered or of Special Concern, and on determining numbers of raptoral birds. Table 1 presents all observations during these surveys.

Habitat Condition and Bird Observations.

Immediately north of the Magic Mountain parking lots are agricultural fields that were actively cultivated during the study period. East of Magic Mountain are planted grassy mesas that have been cleared of most native vegetation and that were cut for hay in late June. The only trees in the study area are a few solitary oaks that dot this section and planted introduced trees within and along the edges of the Magic Mountain development and its main entrance. South of Magic Mountain is an area of native habitat. Hillsides are sage scrub, grading into chaparral in some of the deeper valleys. Wide valleys within the site contain deep sandy soil and support Great Basin sage as well as introduced tree tobacco. A portion of the hills just north of Magic Mountain were burned recently and supported mainly introduced grasses.

The avifauna (see Table 1) is dominated by sage scrub species, with mourning dove, California quail, Bewick's wren, California towhee, and rufous-crowned sparrow being the common species. Grassy areas support mourning dove and lark sparrow. Elderberry bushes in the area attracted orioles, mockingbird and phainopepla and numerous tree tobacco was attractive to orioles and hummingbirds. Food waste at Magic Mountain provided some attraction to starlings, house finch and ravens and trees around this developed area provided nest sites for orioles.

Observations of all birds are shown in Table 1. The numbers shown are of birds seen and heard, with heard individuals forming the majority of the observations. Numbers vary between censuses for several reasons. Some censuses were not complete but, rather, were focused on particular places or areas. Also, bird activity varies with season. Different species breed at different times of the year. In general, species are most easily observed when they are actively defending territories by song during the establishment of breeding pairs. Once pairs are established and nesting begins song often decreases and the numbers of birds observed, therefore, also decreases. After young leave the nest, numbers observed increase. Thus, for most resident species, numbers of adult birds are most accurately censused in April and May, when territorial activity is at a maximum. A few species such as Anna's hummingbird that nest early in the season may be underestimated. Many species that nest in the area also migrate through the area to more northern portions of their ranges. Thus, numbers of nesting species observed in May, which include migratory birds passing through the area, do not give an accurate count of actual resident birds.

Comments on Threatened and Endangered Species

California Gnatcatcher (Polioptila californica)

The California Gnatcatcher was listed as a Threatened species under the Federal Endangered Species Act in 1993. Preferred habitat includes various sage scrub communities, often dominated by California sage (*Artemesia californica*) and buckwheat (*Eriogonum sp.*) California gnatcatchers generally avoid nesting in areas with a slope of greater that 40% (Federal Register, 2003)

Survey routes were selected to cover prime habitat for California Gnatcatcher, namely, stands of dense Sage Scrub in canyon bottoms and on north facing hillsides. During all surveys no California gnatcatchers were heard or observed.

Comments on Sensitive Species

Raptors

The study site contained few suitable trees and no suitable cliffs for nesting. The only raptor nest found was of a red-tailed hawk (Figure 1) which nested on a telephone pole at the edge of the site.

Although the site contained few suitable trees or cliffs for nesting, several red-tailed hawks and a white-tailed kite regularly hunted on the site. Although no owls were seen on the site, barn owls and great horned owls regularly foraged on neighboring areas and can be expected to forage over this site as well.

White-tailed Kite (Elanus leucurus)

This species, formerly the black-shouldered kite, is considered a Species of Special Concern by the State of California. Kites nest in the riparian forest along the Santa Clara River and a single individual regularly hunted over the grassy sections of this area.

Loggerhead Shrike (Lanius ludovicianus)

This is a California Species of Special Concern. Shrikes are resident in the sage scrub and one pair, regularly observed, in the study area, probably nested just west of the property.

Southern California Rufous-crowned Sparrow (Aimophila ruficeps canescens)

This species is considered a California Special Concern species by the Department of Fish and Game and a Species of Concern by the Fish and Wildlife Service. Rufous-crowned sparrows are a fairly common resident and breeding species in denser sections of sage scrub habitat throughout the study site.

Summary

No California gnatcatcher, were observed on the site. Birds of the site are those typical of dry coastal sage scrub habitat and two of the observed species which probably nest on or near the site, loggerhead shrike and Southern California rufous-crowned sparrow, are considered Species of Concern. A third species of concern, the white-tailed kite, nests in riparian woodland along the Santa Clara River and regularly hunted over the area.

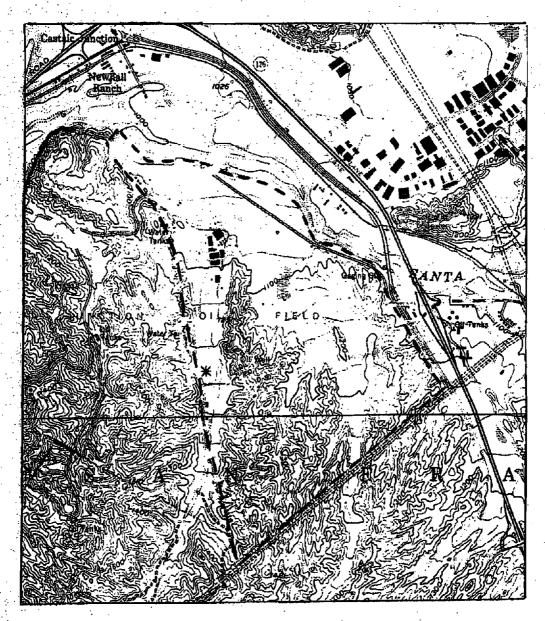
References

Federal Register, 2003. Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Designation of Critical Habitat for the Coastal California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) and Determination of Distinct Vertebrate Population for the California Gnatcatcher *Polioptila californica*). Vol 68, no 79 April 24, 2003, p. 20228.

Endangered Species and S	pecies of C	oncem	Shaded				l	
SPECIES	STATUS	12 Mar	20 0	Dates of	Survey		28-Jun	
SPECIES	SIAIUS	23-Mar	ZO-ADI	11-way	<u> 2-Juri</u>	15-7011	<u> 20-Juli</u>	+
Turkey Vulture	s	5	0	3	0	1	1	
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Red-tailed Hawk	г	0	1	2(2)	5			
American Kestrel	r	0	0	0	0	0	1	
California Quail	r	24	55	46	74	135	132	
Killdeer	r	0	0		4	0	0	
Mourning Dove	L	18	10		80	39	35	
Greater Roadrunner	r	0	0		1	0	1	
White-th. Swift	<u>r</u>	0	0		0	0	0	
Black-chinned Hummingbird	S	0	0		2	2	6	
	r	1	0	2	15	7	16	
Costa's Hummingbird	s	0	. 0	0	0	0	6	
Allen's Hummingbird	r,m	0	0	D	0	1	5	
Nuttall's Woodpecker	r	0	0	0	0	0	1	
Black Phoebe	r	0	0	0	0	1	1	
Say's Phoebe	<u>r</u>	1	0	0	3	0	2	
Ash-throated Flycatcher	S	0	0	0	8	2	0	
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ogielijese Sonkes Kast		3 3 30	3 9 7 2	CONTRACTOR OF STREET				
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10010111 2100211	r	0	0	. 0	0	0	4	
American Robin	r	0	0	0	0	2	0	
TTO TIGE	r	6	3	2	7	20	2	
Northern Mockingbird	<u>r</u>	4 2	6	6	12	19	11	
	Γ	2	1		0	0	2	
	<u>r </u>	0	0	0	0	2	0	
	Γ	0	0	6	6	5	9	
	w,m	0	0	0	2	0	0	
Common Yellowthroat	<u>r</u>	0	1	0	0	0	0	
	<u>m</u>	0	0	1		0		
Spotted Towhee	r	3	4	8	37	19	_0	
								

Endangered Species and	Species of C	oncern S	Shaded					
				Dates of Surveys				
SPECIES	STATUS	23-Mar	28-Apr	11-May	2-Jun	<u>15-Jun</u>	28-Jun	
California Towhee	Г	8	26	24	48	61	37	
Ruleis oldwined spanisys		M. Caroli	0 650	(All File C	300	5 5	3	
Lark Sparrow	r	0	0	6	12	13	3	
Black-headed Grosbeak	s	0	2	0	6	1	2	
Lazuli Bunting	s	0	0	2	2	0	1	-
Red-winged Blackbird	S	0	80	0	0	ő	0	
Brewer's Blackbird	r	0	25	0	0	0	0	
Hooded Oriole	s	0	0	. 0	3	Ö	0	
Bullock's Oriole	s	.0	10	0	14	10	4	
House Finch	r	32	14	46	160	91	225	
Lesser Goldfinch	r	0	Ö	4	14	33	9	
House Sparrow	Г	0	0	0	. 0	5	5	

Figure 1. Map of the proposed Magic Mountain Entertainment Project Area study site near Valencia, California



- - - Approximate boundary of survey area.

* - Red-tailed hawk nest

Base Map: U.S.G.S. 7.5 Minute topographic map for Newhall, California, 1952, photorevised 1988.